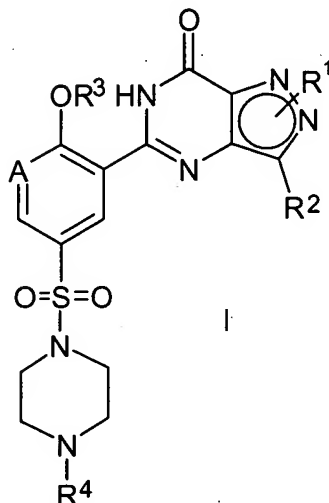


AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1-17 (cancelled)

18. (Currently Amended) A process for the production of a compound of ~~general~~
formula I:



wherein

A represents CH or N;

R¹ represents H, lower alkyl (which alkyl group is optionally interrupted by O), Het, alkylHet, aryl or alkylaryl, which latter five groups are all optionally substituted (and/or, in the case of lower alkyl, optionally terminated) by one or more substituents selected from halo, cyano, nitro, lower alkyl, OR⁵, C(O)R⁶, C(O)OR⁷, C(O)NR⁸R⁹, NR^{10a}R^{10b} and SO₂NR^{11a}R^{11b};

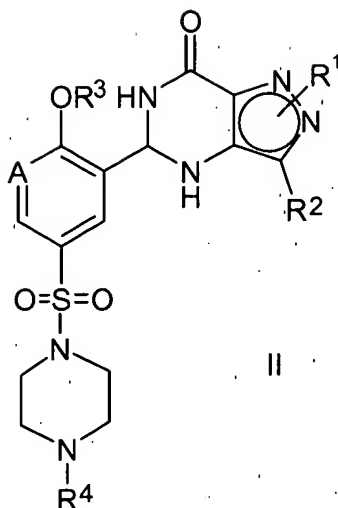
R² and R⁴ independently represent lower alkyl;

R³ represents lower alkyl, which alkyl group is optionally interrupted by oxygen;

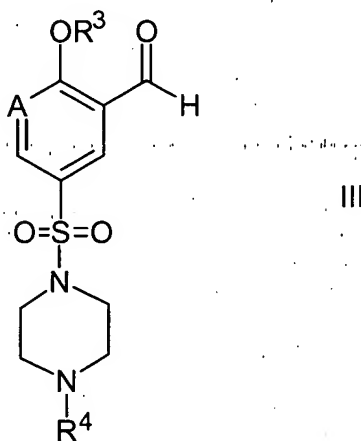
Het represents an optionally substituted four- to twelve-membered heterocyclic group, which group contains one or more heteroatoms selected from nitrogen, oxygen and sulfur;

R⁵, R⁶, R⁷, R⁸, R⁹, R^{11a} and R^{11b} independently represent H or lower alkyl;

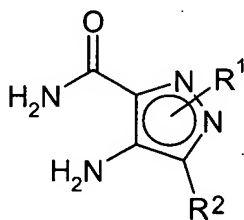
R^{10a} and R^{10b} either independently represent, H or lower alkyl or, together with the nitrogen atom to which they are attached, represent azetidiny, pyrrolidinyl or piperidinyl, which process comprises the dehydrogenation of a compound of ~~general~~ formula II,



wherein A, R¹, R², R³ and R⁴ are as defined above; and
wherein the compound of general formula II is prepared by reaction of a compound of
formula III,



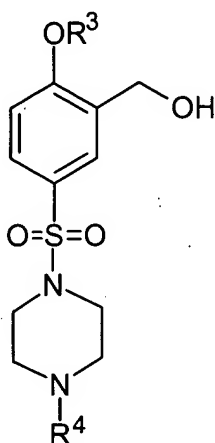
with a compound of general formula IV,



19. (Currently Amended) A process as claimed in Claim 18, wherein the
compound of general formula I is formed in a "one pot" procedure, in which a compound of
formula III is reacted with a compound of general formula IV, after which the

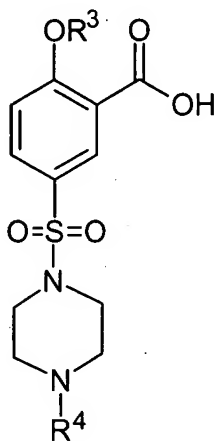
dehydrogenation reaction is performed directly on the intermediate compound of general formula II, formed *in situ*.

20. (previously presented) A process as claimed in Claim 18, wherein, in the compound of formula III, A represents CH, and that compound is prepared by oxidation of a compound of formula VI,



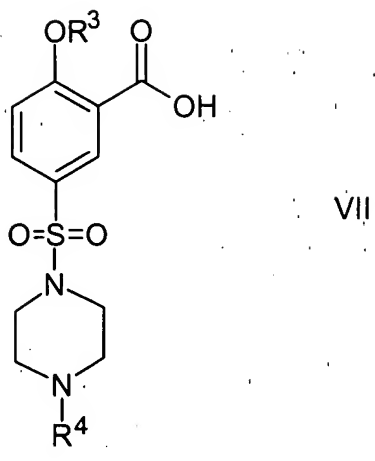
VI

21. (previously presented) A process as claimed in Claim 20, wherein the compound of formula VI is prepared by reduction of a corresponding carboxylic acid of formula VII,

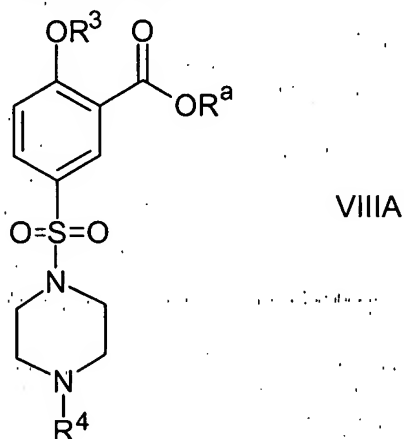


VII

22. (currently amended) A process as claimed in Claim 20, wherein the compound of formula VI is prepared by esterification of a compound of formula VII,



as defined in Claim 21 to form a compound of formula VIIIA,



wherein

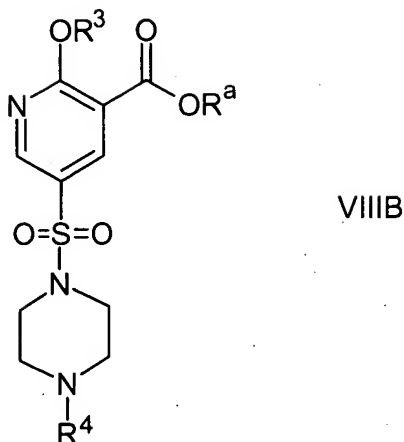
R^a represents lower alkyl; and

R³ represents lower alkyl, which alkyl group is optionally interrupted by oxygen;

R⁴ represents lower alkyl;

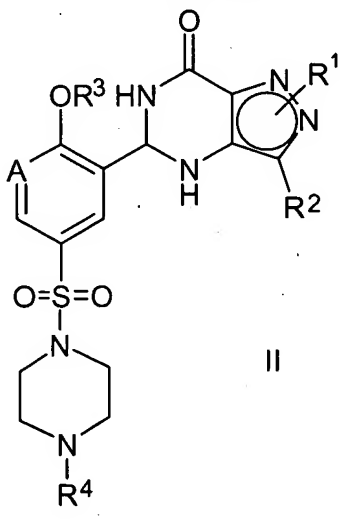
~~R³ and R⁴ are as defined in claim 18, followed by reduction of the ester of formula~~
VIIIA.

23. (currently amended) A process as claimed in Claim 18, wherein, in the compound of formula III, A represents N, and that compound is prepared by reduction of a corresponding compound of formula IIIB,



wherein R^a is lower alkyl as defined in Claim 22, and R³ and R⁴ are as defined in Claim 18.

24. (currently amended) A compound of ~~general formula II~~,



wherein

A represents CH or N;

R¹ represents H, lower alkyl (which alkyl group is optionally interrupted by O), Het, alkylHet, aryl or alkylaryl, which latter five groups are all optionally substituted (and/or, in the case of lower alkyl, optionally terminated) by one or more substituents selected from halo, cyano, nitro, lower alkyl, OR⁵, C(O)R⁶, C(O)OR⁷, C(O)NR⁸R⁹, NR^{10a}R^{10b} and SO₂NR^{11a}R^{11b};

R² and R⁴ independently represent lower alkyl;

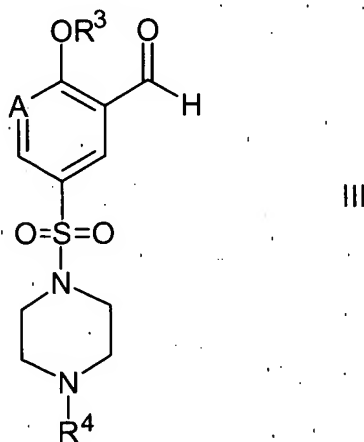
R³ represents lower alkyl, which alkyl group is optionally interrupted by oxygen;

Het represents an optionally substituted four- to twelve-membered heterocyclic group, which group contains one or more heteroatoms selected from nitrogen, oxygen and sulfur;

R⁵, R⁶, R⁷, R⁸, R⁹, R^{11a} and R^{11b} independently represent H or lower alkyl;

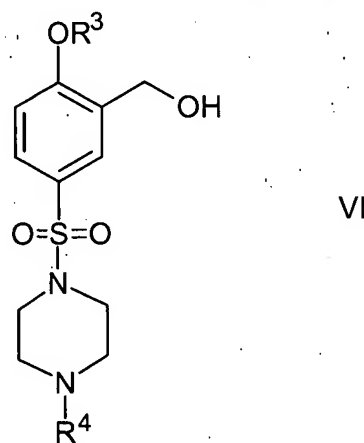
R^{10a} and R^{10b} either independently represent, H or lower alkyl or, together with the nitrogen atom to which they are attached, represent azetidiny, pyrrolidiny or piperidiny as defined in Claim 18.

25. (currently amended) A compound of formula III,



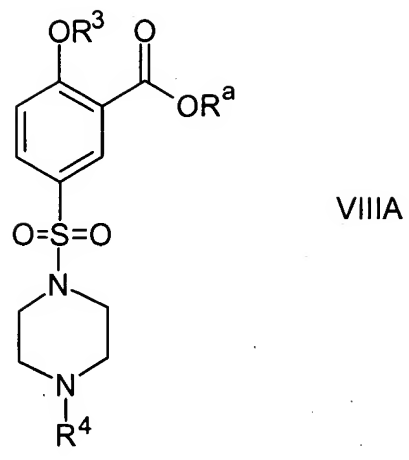
wherein A, R³ and R⁴ are as defined in Claim 24 48.

26. (currently amended) A compound of ~~general~~ formula VI,



wherein R³ and R⁴ are as defined in Claim 2420.

27. (currently amended) A compound of formula VIIIA,



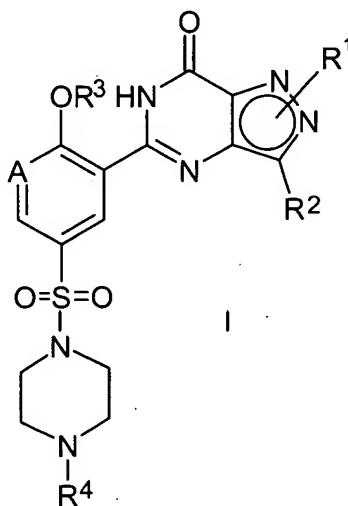
wherein

R^a represents lower alkyl; and

R³ represents lower alkyl, which alkyl group is optionally interrupted by oxygen;

R⁴ represents lower alkyl, with the proviso that when R^a is methyl and R³ is propyl, R⁴ is not methyl or ethyl defined in Claim 22.

28. (currently amended) A process for the production of compounds of general formula I:



wherein

A represents CH or N;

R¹ represents H, lower alkyl (which alkyl group is optionally interrupted by O), Het, alkylHet, aryl or alkylaryl, which latter five groups are all optionally substituted (and/or, in the

case of lower alkyl, optionally terminated) by one or more substituents selected from halo, cyano, nitro, lower alkyl, OR^5 , $C(O)R^6$, $C(O)OR^7$, $C(O)NR^8R^9$, $NR^{10a}R^{10b}$ and $SO_2NR^{11a}R^{11b}$;

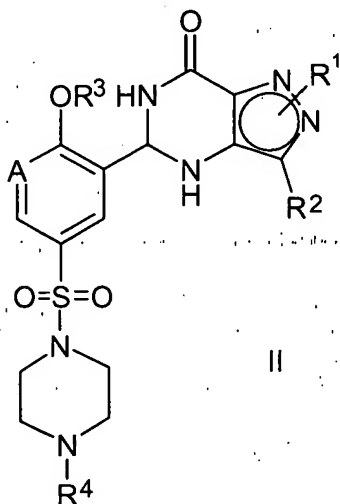
R^2 and R^4 independently represent lower alkyl;

R^3 represents lower alkyl, which alkyl group is optionally interrupted by oxygen;

Het represents an optionally substituted four- to twelve-membered heterocyclic group, which group contains one or more heteroatoms selected from nitrogen, oxygen and sulfur;

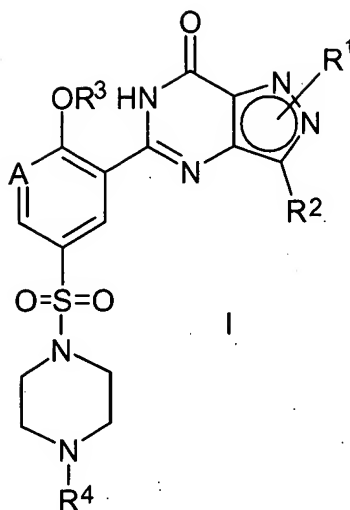
R^5 , R^6 , R^7 , R^8 , R^9 , R^{11a} and R^{11b} independently represent H or lower alkyl;

R^{10a} and R^{10b} either independently represent, H or lower alkyl or, together with the nitrogen atom to which they are attached, represent azetidiny, pyrrolidinyl or piperidinyl; with the proviso that the compound of formula I is not sildenafil; which process comprises the dehydrogenation of a compound of general formula II,



wherein A, R^1 , R^2 , R^3 and R^4 are as defined above.

29. (currently amended) A process for the production of compounds of general formula I:



wherein

A represents CH;

R¹ represents H, lower alkyl (which alkyl group is optionally interrupted by O), Het, alkylHet, aryl or alkylaryl, which latter five groups are all optionally substituted (and/or, in the case of lower alkyl, optionally terminated) by one or more substituents selected from halo, cyano, nitro, lower alkyl, OR⁵, C(O)R⁶, C(O)OR⁷, C(O)NR⁸R⁹, NR^{10a}R^{10b} and SO₂NR^{11a}R^{11b};

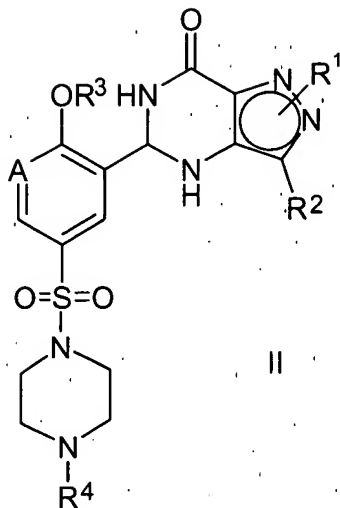
R² and R⁴ independently represent lower alkyl;

R³ represents lower alkyl, which alkyl group is optionally interrupted by oxygen;

Het represents an optionally substituted four- to twelve-membered heterocyclic group, which group contains one or more heteroatoms selected from nitrogen, oxygen and sulfur;

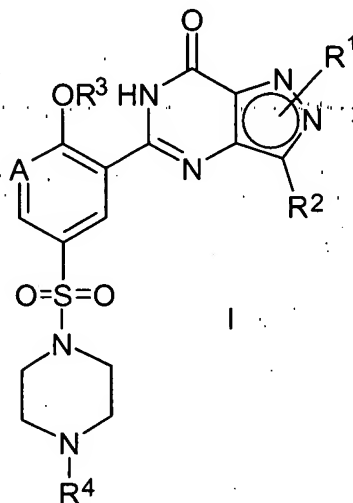
R⁵, R⁶, R⁷, R⁸, R⁹, R^{11a} and R^{11b} independently represent H or lower alkyl;

R^{10a} and R^{10b} either independently represent, H or lower alkyl or, together with the nitrogen atom to which they are attached, represent azetidiny, pyrrolidinyl or piperidinyl; with the proviso that the compound of formula I is not sildenafil; which process comprises the dehydrogenation of a compound of general formula II,



wherein A, R¹, R², R³ and R⁴ are as defined above.

30. (currently amended) A process for the production of compounds of general formula I:



wherein

A represents N;

R¹ represents H, lower alkyl (which alkyl group is optionally interrupted by O), Het, alkylHet, aryl or alkylaryl, which latter five groups are all optionally substituted (and/or, in the case of lower alkyl, optionally terminated) by one or more substituents selected from halo, cyano, nitro, lower alkyl, OR⁵, C(O)R⁶, C(O)OR⁷, C(O)NR⁸R⁹, NR^{10a}R^{10b} and SO₂NR^{11a}R^{11b};

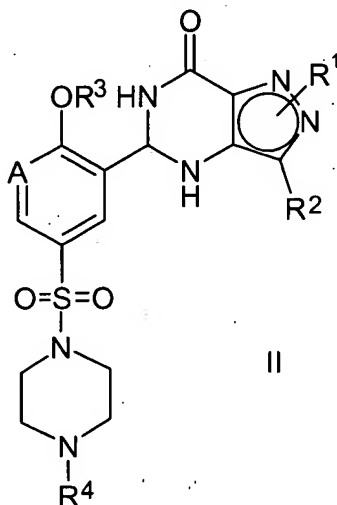
R² and R⁴ independently represent lower alkyl;

R³ represents lower alkyl, which alkyl group is optionally interrupted by oxygen;

Het represents an optionally substituted four- to twelve-membered heterocyclic group, which group contains one or more heteroatoms selected from nitrogen, oxygen and sulfur;

R^5 , R^6 , R^7 , R^8 , R^9 , R^{11a} and R^{11b} independently represent H or lower alkyl;

R^{10a} and R^{10b} either independently represent, H or lower alkyl or, together with the nitrogen atom to which they are attached, represent azetidiny, pyrrolidinyl or piperidinyl, which process comprises the dehydrogenation of a compound of ~~general~~ formula II,



wherein A, R^1 , R^2 , R^3 and R^4 are as defined above.